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SUBJECT: CONCERTACION DECISION TO RUN TWO LISTS FOR UPCOMING
MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS CALLED "PANDORA'S BOX"

REF: Santiago 480

¶1. Summary: Concertacion coalition parties announced on June 5 that they will run two lists of candidates in October's municipal elections, the first time since winning power in 1990 that the Concertacion is running a split ticket. The two larger parties - Socialists and Christian Democrats - will run on one ticket and the two smaller parties -- the Party for Democracy and Social Radicals -- on another. President Bachelet and other senior GOC officials tried to mediate with party leaders to ensure a unity ticket, but failed. The center-right Alianza opposition is salivating at the chance to exploit a divided Concertacion and increase their gains in the elections. Analysts differ in their analysis of the pros and cons of the formula, but generally agree that two lists of candidates could seriously weaken Concertacion coalition cohesion. End Summary.

Two Weeks of debate on "Two Lists"

¶2. The day after President Bachelet's State of the Union address on May 21 (ref a) -- where she called for politicians to approve electoral reform and to "leave aside the calculator" -- the Party for Democracy (PPD) and the Radical Party (PRSD) informed their Concertacion counterparts, the Socialist Party (PS) and the Christian Democrats (DC), that they would run their own list of candidates for municipal council elections in October. Two weeks of debate, commentary and criticisms in media outlets followed. Despite a public call and personal intervention in favor of Concertacion unity by Bachelet, the Concertacion parties were unable to reach an agreement. On June 5, they agreed to disagree announcing that there will be two Concertacion lists for municipal council members (2,134 total seats: one made up of PPD/PRSD candidates and the other of PS/DC). However, the parties agreed that the Concertacion will still run a single candidate in the mayoral races.

¶3. Negotiation of candidacies for the municipal elections has always been a challenge for the Concertacion. Minority parties (PPD and PRSD) historically have been forced to limit their candidates in favor of the larger parties (DC and PS). In the last round of municipal elections in 2004, the Christian Democrats put up 906 candidates for municipal councils, while the other Concertacion parties each put up between 300 and 400. Because a majority of council members are running for re-election this year, all the Concertacion parties would have little wiggle room to increase their number of candidates under a single Concertacion list.

Breaking Free of Coalition Constraints

¶4. Because running as a coalition limits the number of candidates each party can present -- and requires tough seat-by-seat negotiations among the four Concertacion parties -- breaking out into two lists offers some attractions for minority parties. By running two lists, the PPD and PRSD can offer candidacies to over a thousand more supporters. Two lists also give the PPD the chance to

compete openly with the DC, to whom it gave up 16 municipalities in 2004 so that it could run its candidate for Mayor of Santiago (who then lost to an opposition independent). The PPD believes that running its own list with the Radicals is a Concertacion opportunity to elect more council members, arguing that a broader slate will capture more votes from centrist voters who might otherwise vote for the Alianza opposition.

¶15. PPD leader Pepe Auth defended the proposal in an opinion piece by arguing that running two lists is a way to "open the doors and the windows of the Concertacion" and that what is at stake is not the unity of the coalition, but its willingness to "re-encounter the social world that it represents." He stated that running two lists for municipal elections is a way to get around Chile's "binomial politics mentality" which forces Chile's political diversity into two large "blocks" and leaves "few spaces for open competition and new leadership." He called the municipal elections the "front door of democracy" and argued that it should be sufficiently wide enough to allow women, youth, social leaders, representatives of indigenous peoples, and independents to enter.

The Pro-Unity Stance

¶16. For the DC and the PS, the idea of running two lists is anathema. Not only does it open the door to greater intra-coalition competition, but it reportedly favors the opposition Alianza as Concertacion parties compete with each other. It is also a sign that the DC -- historically the largest coalition party -- has lost its leadership position within the Concertacion.

Bachelet Joins the Fray and Gets Burned

¶17. Initially, President Bachelet limited her involvement to underlining Concertacion unity and the government's preference that the Concertacion run one list. The president was criticized for an "evident weakness in government leadership" compared to her predecessors. On June 2, Bachelet --reportedly ceding to continued pressure from the DC and PS leadership -- called all three former Concertacion presidents to a meeting at La Moneda presidential palace, where together they called for Concertacion unity. However, by June 5, the parties were not able to reach an agreement on a single list and announced that the Concertacion would run two lists of municipal council candidates. Analysts have commented in the press that the PPD/PRSD "win" of their own list had a "demolishing effect" on Bachelet's leadership.

Reactions

¶18. Some traditional Concertacion leaders have suggested that running two lists is a "Pandora's Box" that signals the "beginning of the end" of the Concertacion. FM Foxley was less dire but said "it is not a good signal for the country." Others are downplaying the decision, and argue that the two lists make it easier for all parties to run more candidates, include more of their supporters, and avoid tense negotiations over how to divvy up a limited number of coalition nominees. Some predict that it won't make much difference in the number of elected seats overall. Larger concerns regarding what may happen in the longer term -- congressional and presidential elections in 2009 -- have been expressed by the PS/DC while the PPD and the PRSD insist that the two lists will bring a breath of fresh air to municipal elections. They argue that the move should not be interpreted as a sign of division within the Concertacion.

¶19. Meanwhile, the center-right opposition is salivating at the opportunity to exploit intra-Concertacion rivalries in the municipal elections. The two parties that make up the Alianza, which historically run a single list in municipal elections, will try to ensure even greater unity this time and to increase their chances of victory.

¶10. Comment: Bachelet is the first Concertacion president who has been unable to maintain coalition unity in the face of an upcoming electoral cycle. The failure to agree on a single list reveals yet again the differences between the four Concertacion parties, who see

elections as a chance to increase their strength within the Concertacion. However, it is difficult to predict the impact of "two lists" on the October elections. Interestingly, the press dropped the issue of the two lists immediately after the decision was announced. Only time will tell if the Concertacion parties have moved on as well. End comment.

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